

# Advances in Primary Care Reform Made Possible by Legislature

*General Assembly sent key bill to the Governor*

The Delaware General Assembly passed legislation to increase Delawareans' access to high quality, affordable health care through a series of reforms that will refocus Delaware's healthcare system on primary care and improvements in value.

[Senate Substitute 1 for Senate Bill 120](#) requires commercial health insurance companies to make meaningful increases in their primary care investment, limits price increases for hospital and other non-professional services, and compels health insurance companies and health systems to work together to improve healthcare value. By implementing these reforms simultaneously, models show that the increases in primary care investment do not result in unsustainable increases in total cost of care.

"Informed by data and the perspectives of Delaware consumers, physicians, employers, health insurance companies and hospitals, the Delaware Department of Insurance created a road map aimed at ensuring residents have access to high-quality, affordable health care, and that the primary care provider community would be strengthened in the process," stated **Insurance Commissioner Trinidad Navarro**. "Through this legislation, the General Assembly has put these plans into action. We look forward to working with those stakeholders and the General Assembly to implement this important legislation that will improve the health and wellbeing of Delawareans while bending the healthcare cost curve."

The types of reforms included in SS 1 for SB 120 were [first contemplated in a report](#) by the Delaware Department of

Insurance and its [Office of Value-Based Health Care Delivery](#), which was created by the General Assembly in 2019. Those same agencies would be tasked with implementing the legislation, creating necessary regulations, and enforcing its measures. To inform this work, the Office of Value-Based Healthcare Delivery embarked on an extensive data collection and stakeholder engagement process in 2020, which included data from Delaware health insurers, the Delaware Health Information Network Health Care Claims Database, publicly available sources, and perspectives shared during more than two dozen stakeholder interviews.

Research by the Office of Value-Based Health Care Delivery found that primary care spending in Delaware is low relative to the national average and about half of what is spent in leading states. This low investment in primary care services has likely contributed to declining numbers of primary care providers and poor access to primary care statewide. Increased numbers of primary care providers have been associated with improvements in health and decreases in mortality, as well as lower rates of emergency department visits and hospital admissions. Though many states face similar trends, the research also found primary care access problem in Delaware is particularly acute. The state's population is among the oldest in the nation, a trend that will continue to grow.

"With one in five Delawareans are over the age of 65 and two in five of our neighbors living in an area with a shortage of primary care doctors, we have to do more to ensure our communities have access to the frontline providers they need to improve the quality of their health and keep them out of the hospital," said **Senate Majority Leader Bryan Townsend**, the prime sponsor of SS 1 for SB 102. "Even as costs continue to rise for us all, the current system is simply providing positive results for too few Delawareans," he said. "After three years of careful study and consideration, I am confident the legislation that Rep. David Bentz and I passed through the

General Assembly will result in more primary care providers serving our state and better healthcare outcomes for our neighbors.”

“The primary care industry in Delaware is facing substantial challenges. Physicians are retiring or leaving the state, creating a shortage that means poor access to care for residents. Factor in the low levels of investment and we have an unsustainable system. We need to tackle this crisis head-on immediately,” said **Rep. David Bentz**, the bill’s lead House sponsor. “SS 1 for SB 120 will modernize and enhance primary care services in Delaware by directing the Health Care Commission to monitor and promote compliance with alternative payment models that promote value-based care. Primary care is critical in our efforts to improve public health outcomes and reduce long-term costs. It is, without question, where we get the best return on investment with our healthcare spend both financially and in-terms of the health of our population. I look forward to Governor Carney signing this bill into law to reverse the losses we’ve seen in recent years.”